

# End of a Princely State in Hunza, Pakistan: Modernization of a Peripheral Community

Hafizullah Emadi

Independent Scholar and International Development Consultant, 1812 Corinth Street, #7  
Los Angeles, CA, 90025, Tel: 1-310-479-0914, Email address: hafizullah.emadi@gmail.com

## Abstract

Modernization is often viewed as economic development and nation states as agents of modernization are considered to be responsible for provision of basic services to citizens so that they discard their traditional way of living and integrate themselves to the requirements of a new era. The Ismaili-settled region of Hunza in the northern part of Pakistan is one of the areas that was ruled by local autocratic leader who did not care for the welfare of his subjects but his own selfish interest. Ismailis remained poor and suffered and aspired to transform their shattered lives. The disintegration of the princely state of Hunza heralded the beginning of change and modernization and the process intensified after the Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan established modern institutions and appointed new leaders to guide the community. The model of development pursued by leadership emphasized partnership of private, public and civil society organizations as encompassing power with the objective to provide enabling environment for people to use their skills, talents and expertise as active participant for development. The strategy of empowering people and communities to make a difference in their lives helped Ismailis to modernize their backward economy and remain active participant in the process of change and development.

**Keywords:** Leadership role, modernization, economic development, social movement, participatory development, partnership of private, public and civil society institutions.

## Modernization Paradigm

Use of the concept of modernization is relatively new in the academic community and three major historical events that shaped the course of international development contributed to a wider usage of the discourse in the academic and non-academic communities.<sup>34</sup> These events include: a) the rise of the United States as a major imperial power in the post-World War II period that coincided with the decline of European colonial powers. The United States as a leading world power initiated the Marshal Plan for reconstruction of war-torn Europe and provided economic and technical assistance to developing countries to influence the direction of economic and political development, b) Expansion of the Soviet Union's influence to Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin American countries and the spread of radical and socialist motivated movements world-wide for societal justice and c) emergence of nation states in the developing world after the demise of the European colonial domination as these nascent nation states were in pursuit of their own political identity and economic development models that suited their interest.

Scholars and policy makers studying modernization generally agree on the notion that a modern society could be characterized as one with high level of productivity in the areas of economic, social, education, etc. and citizens in need of assistance are entitled to more welfare and basic services.<sup>35</sup> A major characteristic of a modern society is secularization of political culture – separation of religion and state, however there is tendency to view religion as part of societal development - a return to holistic approach by religious oriented groups and associations.

There is no commonly accepted definition of the word modernization and the word generally refers to economic development. Although a plethora of literature exists that study modernization in the developed and developing world, their analysis is largely influenced by three major modernization paradigms that dominated the debate on the subject matter in the academia since the 1960s. These three school of thoughts include: a) the linear stage theory, b) the modernity theory and 3) the structural-functional theory. Proponents of the first school of thought argue that the course of development and modernization is linear and continuous progression from one end point to the other. To them development is a lengthy process taking generations and centuries to be completed. Modernity theory that draws on Western conservative intellectual tradition reflects the role of external factors as a driving force of modernity and proponents of the school maintain that by adopting western

<sup>34</sup>. For details see, Dean C. Tipps. "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15:2 (March 1973): 199-226.

<sup>35</sup>. For details see, *Achieving Sustainable Development and Promoting Development Cooperation: Dialogues at the Economic and Social Council*. New York: United Nations, 2008.

technology and way of life underdeveloped societies can transform their backward socio-economic infrastructures. Advocates of the structural-functional school of thought emphasize the independence of social institutions and their impact on the process of change. Various social and economic variables contribute to societal changes from one type to another. Development is a revolutionary process, and for societies to become modern they need to replace their traditional socio-political structures and cultural values by a set of modern structure and its corresponding social and cultural values and political system.

The linear and modernity theories are inadequate because they view modernization as individual nation-state phenomenon and fail to consider the role and influence of various societal variables in the modernization process and the consequential application of Western socio-political system leading to further underdevelopment of peripheral societies. They also fail to reflect on the role of leadership in the process of modernization and development. Although the structural-functionalist paradigm stresses the role of vanguard organization in leading societies through revolutionary changes, it does not adequately emphasize the role of leadership in steering societies, institutions and people in the process of social, economic and political transformation. One of the chief characteristics of a leader is defined in these words: a leader is one “who knows the way, shows the way and goes the way.” A transformative and visionary leader helps steer smooth transition of society guarding against political and social decay that might ensue instability and violence.

Resistance to change and modernization is inevitable and it eventually gives way to acceptance. The perception that modernization is synonymous with secularization has polarized conservative religious communities throughout the world particularly the Muslim world. Educated and enlightened Muslims that constitute a minority of the population embrace modernity as they do not see any dichotomy between modernization and religion - Islam while conservatives and dogmatic clerics and religious leaders who regard themselves as the sole custodian of religion view modernization as anathema to Islamic culture, traditions and way of life and work to preserve the status quo. A major element of modernization entails emancipation of women and their inclusion in social, political and economic development. Conservatives and dogmatic Muslim leaders view women’s emancipation as a threat to the patriarchal system and its corresponding culture and politics. They view modernization as an attempt by Western societies to undermine the Islamic way of life by promoting an alien lifestyle, ethos, and values.

The focus of this article is to study the process of modernization in the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim community of Hunza, Pakistan. Ismailis constitute a minority within the larger Muslim population (Islam is divided into two major sects, Sunnis and Shias each with its own subsects) and they support modernization because their spiritual leader, His Highness the Aga Khan argues that there must be a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of the community’s life. Ismailis adopted themselves to a modern way of life. Establishment of social, cultural and development institutions whose mandate is to improve the quality of life of people helped communities to transform their lives. Ismailis rally around their Imam, the Aga Khan, spiritual and temporal head of the community who guides the activities of the Imam institutions and the Aga Khan Development Network, AKDN. The AKDN has been active in community development projects in both Ismaili and non-Ismaili-settled regions in the developing world with the objective to enable people in isolated and remote areas to transform their traditional way of life and integrate themselves into the modern era.

Governments in most developing countries have difficulty providing basic utilities and services to their citizens, and Non-Government Organizations, NGOs have increasingly stepped in to provide the means to prevent disease, malnutrition, and destitution, and perhaps even to improve a community’s current condition, without an overt political or religious agenda. In part for this reason they tend to be welcomed by residents in a way that other foreign aid providers are not.

The author uses structural-functional theory as a frame of analysis because it provides a comprehensive understanding of societal variables that influenced the course of modernization in Hunza. The article explores the role of leadership - the Ismaili Imam and the Ismaili institutions in modernization and development of Hunza and examines how development and support programs initiated by the leadership led to improvement in the standards of living of the people and enabled them to assimilate themselves into the modern world without compromising their cultural identity.

### **Geography: Constraint to Development**

Hunza’s landscape dotted with high mountains and deep and narrow valley isolated communities of different cultures and traditions. Lack of modern transportation and communications contributed to isolation and underdevelopment of the region until the 1960s. Hunza was known as Kiliktsum Mayuntsar, the words referred to the Kilik Pass in the north and the Mayun village in the south. Western visitors to the region called Hunza the “roof of the world”, “heaven on the earth” and “Shangri-la.” It is situated in the mountainous regions in the Northern Area of Pakistan and is bisected lengthwise by the Hunza River with Hunza on the north bank and Nagar on the south bank of the river. Residents of Hunza are Ismailis and those of Nagar are adherent to the Shia faith of Islam. Prior to the opening of the Karakoram Highway, 1959-1978 (the Highway links Pakistan to the

Xinjiang province of China) it took two days to walk the dangerous pathway known the Silk Road from Gilgit to Baltit (renamed Karimabad) in central Hunza. The pathway is very narrow, less than half a meter wide in some places. In other parts the pathway bare cliff faces are crossed using logs wedged into the cracks precariously balanced by stones.

There are 46 villages and 5,966 households in Hunza with a total population of 52,115 people.<sup>36</sup> The majority of people are engaged in agricultural activities and average farmer owns between 1.5-2 acres of agricultural land and less than 3 acres of uncultivated land.<sup>37</sup> Agricultural land is scarce and arranged in terraces tilled by hand. Some plots of land are so small that an ox can scarcely turn around as a farmer ploughs the land. Families make extreme use of animal manure for fertilizing the land as its soil is little more than porous glacial silt in the canal. In the past farmers were obligated to hand over a portion of their agricultural produce to the king, who is known by the title of *Tham* or *Mir*, and to the village headman; the remainder was stretched to feed their families until next harvest season. Principal agricultural products used to be wheat and maize, and since 1886 potatoes “a colonial heritage brought for the first time to the region by Colonel Lockhart”<sup>38</sup> which is primarily grown in Gujal and utilized as a cash crop.

Irrigation is the life-blood of the valley. Although canals for irrigation of land existed throughout Hunza, a major irrigation canal known as the Hunza Canal which runs about six miles long and clings to the sheer cliff faces was constructed with primitive tools and the collective labor of the community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, providing water to the fields around Karimabad, the largest settlement in Hunza. Members of each tribe are responsible for maintaining and cleaning their parts of the canal. The canal serves as a unifying factor of various tribes as they share the water for irrigation and other purposes. Water is regarded by the people as a precious gift from God and to show their respect people participate in an annual ritual for opening of the canal.

Traders and businessmen from Khaybar Pakhtunkhwa formerly known as the North West Frontier Province, NWFP visit Hunza every harvest season, purchase agricultural products and transport them to markets in Pakistan. Since the opening of the Karakoram Highway trades and businesses are increasingly conducted with China. Chinese trucks carry goods and merchandise to Pakistan and back to China and the government and private operated tour buses ferry tourists to and from China. Farmers do not have adequate means of transportation to export their products to markets outside Pakistan. Due to their lack of experience interacting with external markets, farmers were at a disadvantage when exploring more beneficial ways to sell their agricultural products on their own.

### **Ethnicity and Settlement Patterns**

Residents of Hunza maintain that they are descendants of the Aryan race who settled in the region in the ancient time. Brushusho are the first settlers followed by the Shin and Baloth. Four major ethno-linguistic groups comprise Hunza's population. The Shin resides in lower Hunza and their language is called Shina, a derivative of the Dardic group of Indo-Aryan languages.<sup>39</sup> Hunzakut or the people of Hunza are also known as Burusho and they reside in central Hunza. They were part of the ruling elite in the former Hunza princely state and speak the Brushaski language.<sup>40</sup>

The Wakhi people of Gojal migrated from Wakhan, Afghanistan. Their oral history states that an old man named Shah Talib of Yamagan, Badakhshan came to the Hussaini village, settled there and after he died a shrine was built as a memorial for him. Wakhan remained an autonomous region in eastern Afghanistan until King Abd al-Rahman annexed it to Kabul in 1883 forcing its leader Ali Mardan Shah and half of the Wakhis to flee across the border to Yasin and Ishkoman. The Wakhi refugees first settled in Chiporsun, upper Hunza and later they settled in areas stretching from Gulmit to Pasu. They speak Wakhi that belongs to the East-Iranian Pamir languages. It has no script and people cannot read and write in their mother tongue; they rely on oral tradition to preserve and transmit their history.

The Bericho or Dom constitutes a minority community, settled in a village adjacent to Baltit. It is commonly believed that several hundred years ago their ancestors settled in the region because the ruler of Baltistan sent them as royal dowry to the ruler of Hunza who later granted these people with some land near his

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<sup>36</sup>. Karakoram Area Development Organization, KADO, 2007.

<sup>37</sup>. Discussions with Mohammad Jafar Mukhi of Gulmit's Central *Jamatkhanah*, Gulmit, 14 September 2007.

<sup>38</sup>. Sabine Felmy. *The Voice of the Nightingale: A Personal Account of the Wakhi Culture in Hunza*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 51.

<sup>39</sup>. Shina is spoken throughout Gilgit, Diamer district, parts of Baltistan, Kohistan, Kashmir and NWFP. Total population speaking the language is about 450,000-500,000 people

<sup>40</sup>. Available data indicate that Brutusho speaking population is estimated to be 52,115 for Hunza, 52,000 for Nagar, 40,000 for Yasin, 30,000 in the Gilgit Area.

capital, Baltit. The new settler community provided musicians and services such as blacksmithing.<sup>41</sup> The community speaks a language known as Dumaaki or Bericheski.

Dominant tribes include the Diramiting who were associated with the Mir, serving as army officers and state functionaries and today some also serve in the Pakistani army as commissioned officers. Other tribes are Bartaling, Khorkuts, Brong, Husanukuts and Ganish. People of upper class families are distant relatives of the former Mir and about 20% of them own land and businesses.<sup>42</sup> The [Farsi] language was taught at schools and *madrasas* until 1947 and it was gradually replaced by Urdu language.<sup>43</sup> Today the Urdu and English languages are used for bookkeeping, registration and written communication among government departments.

### Politics of Domination and Liberation

In the distant past Hunza and its neighbor Nagar were a single entity, it was later divided as their rulers engaged in periodic battles with each other for domination and control of the entire valley. There were some periods of relative stability and cooperation as a result of intermarriages between the families of the two ruling dynasties. The rulers constructed castles and forts housing their families and people who sought shelter in times of conflicts with rival communities. The Mir of Hunza resided in the Altit Fort but disputes between two sons of Mir Sultan, Shah Abbas (Shaboos) and Ali Khan led to the transfer of the seat to the Baltit Fort. Confrontations between the two brothers continued until the younger brother was killed and since then Baltit became the center of political power in Hunza. This medieval castle is strategically located about 2,800 meters above sea level and dominates the village of Baltit, overlooking the majestic white pyramid, Mount Rakapushi, one of the highest peaks of the Karakoram mountain ranges.

Hunza owes much to its powerful leader Mir Salim (1790-1824), a charismatic ruler who singlehandedly ruled the villages of Baltit, Altit and Ganish. Salim extended his rule to upper Hunza, encouraged the settlement of the Wakhi people from Badakhshan, Afghanistan into the valley to be his vassals, and brought Shimshal under his rule. Salim was succeeded by Ghazanfar (1824-1865) and Ghazan (1865-1886) who firmly established his rule over upper and lower Hunza; it is due to this ruler's efforts that pockets of Hunzakut settlements are found in lower and upper Hunza.

Hunza's strategic location helped the Mir to derive a great deal of power and wealth as India-bound traders and caravans from Central Asia and merchants from Badakhshan who came to buy stocks were subject to the rule of the Mir and his men. Additional wealth accrued as Hunza became a center for the slave trade, providing slaves to those who could afford the price. The Mir ruled with an iron-hand and forced corvee laborers to cultivate his land under the supervision of *Yerfah*, or stewards. After the British invasion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "the corvee system was replaced by one of leasing out the Mir's land in return for a fixed annual rent, which was paid with a portion of the crops harvested."<sup>44</sup> To maintain effective control over the people the Mir created a hierarchical system of governance and appointed representatives even to the most remote villages to ensure that people remained loyal to him and implemented his orders. The Mir sat at the top of the power pyramid assisted by his *Wazir*, council and tribal chiefs, and tribal mediators with community elders situated at the bottom of the power structure. This system based on one-man rule deprived people of opportunities to participate in the political affairs of the community.

Hunza acknowledged the suzerainty of its neighbors, China in the northwest, Kashmir in the north and Gilgit in the south. The Mir cultivated friendly ties with imperial China to the extent that the Chinese granted him and his people grazing rights to the pastures of the Taghdumbash Pamir in Sar-e-qol and provided the Mir with Chinese products such as silk, cotton, tea and Chinaware. In 1937 relations between Hunza and China deteriorated to the extent that Mir Mohammad Nazim was forced to relinquish his rights to the pastures. When the Communists seized power in China in 1949 all communications with Hunza were terminated and remained so until the opening of the Karakoram Highway.

The British colonial government launched an offensive on Hunza in December 1891 causing Mir Safdar Ali (1886-1891) to flee to Kashghar, China. The British installed his younger half-brother Mohammad Nazim to power in January 1892 who remained obedient to the British until his death in 1938. Subsequent rulers of Hunza resided in the Baltit Fort until 1945 when Mohammad Jamal (1945-1974) moved into a newly constructed palace. After the British withdrawal and partition of the Indian sub-continent into Pakistan and India in 1947 Hunza remained part of the Indian Kashmir Territory. The people fought off the army of Dogra king of Kashmir and Hunza became part of Pakistan on 1 November 1948.<sup>45</sup> Although Hunza was brought under the rule of

<sup>41</sup>. H. Sidky. *Hunza: An Ethnographic Outline* (Jaipur, India: Illustrated Book Publishers, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>42</sup>. Discussions with Shifa Ali, Ganish, Hunza, 12 September 2007.

<sup>43</sup>. Stephen R. Wilson. *A look at Hunza Culture* (Islamabad: National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, and Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1999), p.10.

<sup>44</sup>. H. Sidky. op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>45</sup>. Discussions with Nazir A. Sabir, Islamabad, Pakistan, 18 September 2007.

Pakistan, Mohammad Jamal retained his status as the powerful leader of the princely state of Hunza. He was stripped of his status as Mir when Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto abolished all princely states in the north on 25 September 1974, bringing Hunza under the jurisdiction of the federal government. However the Mir commanded considerable influence until he died in 1976 and his sons continued to play critical roles in the region's politics. The Mir's eldest son Ghazanfar Ali owns a hotel and he is the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Areas government. Although Hunza is under the federal government, it is not completely incorporated into the federal structure as the people are not allowed to vote during the general elections to the National Assembly, however whenever residents of Hunza travel abroad they carry Pakistani passports.

### **Emergence of the Ismaili Faith**

In ancient times people of Hunza adhered to the practice of Shamanism, a belief system whose philosophical orientation rested on the dogma of invisible gods, fairies, demons and ancestral spirits. Later on Buddhism established its presence in Hunza and Gilgit and adjacent areas followed by the introduction of Islam. Ismailis are an offshoot of the Shia Muslims and His Highness Karim Aga Khan IV is the 49<sup>th</sup> and living Imam of the community worldwide.

The Mongol invasion of Persia in the thirteen century forced a significant number of Ismailis to flee to Central Asia and the northern areas of the Indian-subcontinent where they were known as *Mawlais*. It is suggested that the Ismaili faith had established its influence in Hunza in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, replacing the Shia faith. A prominent Ismaili *Dai*, missionary Sayed Shah Ardabil come through Misgar to Upper Hunza, held a meeting with the Mir regarding the Ismaili faith and propagated the Ismaili Tariqah there.<sup>46</sup> The Mir was sympathetic to the Ismaili cause and welcomed Ismaili *Dais* in subsequent years and allowed them to freely access to the community. One such *Dai* is Sayed Hussain Ardabil, son of Shah Ardabil who visited Hunza to ensure that the faith would sustain and spread beyond Hunza. Another *Dai* is Sayed Yaqut Shah who visited Hunza in 1838 and after 25 days he returned home and appointed *Khalifahs*, representatives in each village to supervise religious affairs of the community.

The Ismaili Imams remained hidden from the public for several hundred years since the collapse of their headquarters in Persia by the Mongols and they were only known to certain individuals. The Ismaili *Dawa*, propagation gradually resurfaced in the Anjudan region of Persia and assumed a prominent feature when their leader Hasan Ali Shah, the Aga Khan I fought the King of Persia in 1838 and 1840, defeated and migrated to the British controlled India and his successor Aqa Ali Shah, Aga Khan II who was succeeded by his son Sultan Mohammad Shah, Aga Khan III lived in India and received dignitaries including a delegation from Hunza in 1892 and issued them directives and guidance regarding the daily administration of the communities.

It was not feasible for the Imam to visit each community and personally oversee religious, cultural and social affairs of the communities. The Imam appointed a number of *Pirs*, religious leaders to supervise social, cultural and religious affairs. The *Pir* in turn appointed *Khalifahs*, representatives to Ismaili settled villages who guided the community in his absence. The *Pir* was not necessarily a resident of Hunza but visited the region from time to time. Ismailis gathered in private houses to practice their faith until the first *Jamatkhanah*, a communal house of worship for performing religious services was built in 1922 and at present there are about one hundred *Jamatkhanahs* throughout Hunza.

Aga Khan III had played a critical role in politics in the Indian sub-continent. However the political situation prevented his intended visit to the Northern Areas in 1922 and he sent Abdul Samad, an influential figure who served twenty years in the British armed forces of India to a mission in Hunza.<sup>47</sup> The Aga Khan gradually dismantled the hereditary system of leadership headed by the *Pir* in the 1940s and appointed new leaders called *Mukhis* and their assistant *Kamadias*. The Aga Khan IV continued his grandfather's tradition, established modern institutions to govern every aspect of the community and visited Hunza on several occasions to oversee development projects under taken by his institutions. The Aga Khan remained on good terms with the Mir of Hunza and when he married his wife Begum Salimah on 28 October 1969, dignitaries attended the wedding party that included the Mir and his wife who showered pearls at the feet of the Aga Khan and his wife.<sup>48</sup> The Aga Khan initiated additional reforms in 1969; established a Supreme Council for the Northern Areas and Chitral to guide the community and safeguard its vested interest. The Mir was not in a position to oppose or resist the reform, but he was appointed head of the Council. Dad Ali from Hyderabad was the first president of the Council and after his tenure ended Ghulam Mohammad Beg (he was killed in a plane crash in late 1980s.) known GM-Beg succeeded him. Baig managed a bookstore in Gilgit and served as guide to tourists

<sup>46</sup>. Stephen R. Wilson. op. cit, p. 148.

<sup>47</sup>. Farhad Daftary. *The Ismailis: Their history and doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 536.

<sup>48</sup>. <http://ismaili.net/timeline/69.html>. Site visited on 21 October 2007.

in the northern areas. Former *Khalifahs* welcomed the change as they served as *Mukhis* and *Kamadias* until the term of their services ended and new leaders were appointed.

### **Bridging Ethno-Tribal and Sectarian Differences**

When Hunza embraced the Ismaili faith some rulers of Hunza remained biased toward the Ismailis and tacitly supported the Shias and it is due to this reason that number of Shias had increased in Hunza in subsequent years. At present Ismailis constitute 95 percent of the population in Hunza with the remaining 5 percent Shias who primarily reside in Ganish, Dorkhand, Garelt, and parts of Murtazabad. The Aga Khan has always stressed the principle of diversity and pluralism as the source of strength of communities of different cultural backgrounds and it is due to his leadership that Ismailis of various tribal and ethno-linguistic backgrounds put aside their internal differences and rally in support of the Ismaili institutions. Although differences exist among ethno-tribal communities, such differences do not lead to adversarial conflict because disputes are resolved through mediation. These differences have their roots in the distant past as one tribe dominated and suppressed the others. For example, the Wakhis and Shins have their differences with people of central Hunza who speak Brushaski. In the past some tribes of the Brushaski speaking community were part of the Mir functionaries that sustained the Mir's rule in lower and upper Hunza and after the abolishment of the kingdom they continued to wield power over the Wakhis and Shins in the socio-political domain. It is largely due to these reasons that the Wakhis and Shins continue to harbor grudges against their distant masters.

Regional differences complicated relationship between Ismailis in the north, Hunza and their Khoja counterparts in the south, Karachi since modern institutional structures were established in Hunza. Ismailis in the north are mainly subsistence farmers and their counterparts in the south are entrepreneurs engaged in business and trade activities. The north lacked institutional experience and followed instructions by the south – the Ismaili National Council in Karachi. A number of technocratic elites in Hunza (mainly working at government offices and teaching at public schools, etc.) were not happy with the status quo and aspired for autonomy and greater role in leading institutions in their hometown and agitated an end to Khojas' dominant position and their role in influencing appointments of institutional leaders in the north. The Khojas have years of experience as managers and leaders of Ismaili institutions and their privileged position in the leadership hierarchy helped them to maintain their foothold in the leadership structure, supervising community affairs throughout Pakistan. Lack of resources and employment opportunities in Hunza caused outward migration of people to other cities in Pakistan mainly to Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore where some managed to start small-scale retail businesses with funds provided by the National Council and others became business partners with their Khoja counterparts – situations that gradually paved the road for greater interactions and cooperation between members of the two communities. Relations between the north and south that remained fragile for several years gradually but steadily began to change and provision of fund for development programs in Hunza by AKDN led to greater improvement of relations between the north and south.

Religious differences between Ismailis and the Shia enclave in Hunza was a divisive issue that clouded relations between them and sometime paved the road to greater tensions. For example, when relations between the two communities soured the Shias blocked a portion of the Karakoram Highway, denying Ismailis of lower Hunza with access to the market both in Gilgit and central Hunza. A new makeshift road was constructed after Nazir Sabir was elected to the legislative council for Northern Areas in 1994 to avoid roadblocks and confrontation with the Shias in the future. The road connects lower Hunza to central Hunza and bypasses the Shia community.<sup>49</sup> The Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan always instructed his followers to support peace and unity and remain loyal citizens to countries where they reside and for this reason Ismailis avoided any confrontation with their Shia neighbors and continued negotiation with Shia tribal and religious leaders led to a successful resolution of hostilities and improvement of working relations between the two communities.

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<sup>49</sup>. Nazir Sabir was born in a small village in Shiporsun, Gojal and become involved in local politics. He defeated the incumbent officer Ghazanfar Ali because people by in large were disenchanted with the status quo as incumbent leaders did not make people the center of their policy agendas and overwhelmingly supported Sabir. A year later the government of Pakistan appointed Sabir advisor for Education and advisor the Tourism for the Northern Areas. Sabir is an internationally known mountaineer. He is the only person from Pakistan who has climbed the Mount Everest along with Eiho Otana, his Japanese counterpart on 7 August 1981 and climbed the K-2 (8,035 meters) and Brood Peak (8,048 meters) with well-known mountaineer Reinhold Messner and a Pakistani fellow Sher Khan in 1982. In 1992 Sabir received two prestigious awards: President's Medal for his extraordinary achievements in Mountain Sports and Star of Distinction. Sabir was elected President of Alpine Club of Pakistan in 2004 and is re-elected as its president for another three year term on 26 October 2007. Sabir is also a member of several mountaineering clubs in Asia, Europe and North America and manages his own business, Nazir Sabir Expedition with its main office in Islamabad.

Although mainstream Sunnis in the north have high regard toward Ismailis and their institutions, Islamic fundamentalists consider Ismailis to be heretics who deviated from the right path of Islam as they understand and interpret the Quran and other scriptures. They also objected to involvement of Ismaili institutions in the development of national educational programs for Pakistan when the government of Pakistan requested the Institute of Educational Development of the Aga Khan University in Karachi to develop a curriculum for schools and colleges. Islamic fundamentalists vehemently objected to the government's decision to engage Ismailis in such a national project however their efforts and opposition did not deter the government of Pakistan to involve Ismaili institutions as partners in the development projects. Ismailis are a moderate community in the Islamic world and those in Pakistan are patriots and citizens of Pakistan. The extent of their loyalty was demonstrated by their participation in the war of liberation of the Northern Areas from India as well as their participation in other wars including the Kirgil war in Kashmir. For example, Shah Khan is a hero of the war of national liberation from India in 1948 and Lalak Jan from Yasin of Ghizer district received a posthumous award of *Nishan-e-Haidar*, the highest military award for his role in the Kirgil War in 1999.

### **Political Movement for Reform**

Ismailis endured miseries and political repression during the kingdom era which caused greater disenchantment among educated strata agitating for social, cultural and political reforms. Struggle for reform gained momentum as early as the 1960s. Men and women who attended institutions of higher education were exposed to liberal and democratic ideologies of political parties fighting for a democratic system of governance and societal justice. A number of Ismailis also became involved in the struggle for democracy and to achieve their objectives these social activists exchanged views with people hoping to win them in support of their politics. They marveled at the socialist ideology propounded by the Soviet Union and a few even went to Russia for higher studies. Although Hunza has a common border with Xinjiang province of China with a significant Ismaili population, the political ideology of Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung did not manage to establish its influence there. One possible explanation for this may be that China is a close ally of Pakistan and the Pakistani ruling class in the state apparatus enjoyed friendly ties with the Mir. This may have caused Ismaili intellectuals to view China as an ally of the repressive state bureaucracy, while the Soviet Union was more positively regarded as friends of people fighting for societal justice. They were thus more inclined toward Soviet policies of socialist development as an alternative model of development for Hunza.

Reformists and liberals such as Ghulam Mohammad (he hails from Sost is a known social activist who was incarcerated for a short time for his vocal opposition to the status quo) and others supported Bhutto's Peoples Party, PPP formed in 1967. Bhutto nurtured closer ties with China, hailed Mao Tse-tung and tried to project himself as an icon for a new movement in Pakistan. Bhutto's rhetoric, food, clothes and shelters enticed some Ismailis to support the PPP and a few even became activists for the cause of the party.

After the dissolution of the princely state secular and religious institutions were established to guide the community in Hunza. Individuals in charge of the former are elected by the people and those in charge of the latter are appointed by the Aga Khan. The government of Pakistan sends government officials to run the local state apparatuses and the people elect civil representatives to liaison with the central government. The Aga Khan appoints head of the Ismaili Regional Council and *Mukhis* and *Kamadia* to supervise religious practices at various *Jamatkhanahs* throughout Hunza.

### **Modernization of Hunza**

Hunza was one of the peripheral communities in the north with a primitive economy and authoritarian governance system. Most of its people eked out a living by laboring on the small agricultural fields while a very few owned shops or small businesses (only nine in 1967). Neither the Mir nor the British colonial government made an effort to develop Hunza's infrastructure; instead they sponsored projects that helped to consolidate their rule and built recreational facilities for their own amusement. A polo ground in Shandur, Gilgit by the British is one such recreational facility.

The colonial officers supported efforts to establish numerous new polo grounds within the Gilgit Agency. In 1936 the first polo tournament took place on Shandur Top, at an altitude of 3,700 meters. Major Cobb, who happened to be fond of playing polo under a full moon, named the ground on the Shandur Pass "Moony Polo Ground." The annual polo tournaments can only take place after the last patches of snow have disappeared. Shandur is the highest polo ground in the world and one of the most beautifully situated, in a natural meadow environment surrounded by snow-clad peaks.<sup>50</sup>

Polo was a prominent game during and after the British colonial rule until it came to an end in the 1960s as people engaged in other types of recreational activities. However one of the AKDN's agencies, the Aga Khan

<sup>50</sup>. Sabine Felmy. op. cit., p. 60.

Rural Support Program, AKRSP (founded in December 1982) works to revive the tradition and has formed the Polo Trust for the Northern Areas.

Initial steps toward modernization of Hunza's economy began in 1949 and was pioneered by John Clark, a young American geologist. Clark believed that lack of development projects would entice the people to look onto China for leadership and building development projects would uplift the life of the people and would deter the Chinese influence. To this end Clark provided educational and medical services, established a small-scale craft industry and introduced vegetable seeds intended for export generating some income for the community.<sup>51</sup> Clark encountered political problems as the Mir and the government of Pakistan thought his activities would undermine their authority and ordered him to leave Hunza. Clark failed to achieve his objectives and left the area, leaving Hunza without further development projects. Intensive modernization of Hunza's infrastructure began after the opening of the Karakoram Highway. The road opened opportunities for trade and commerce as more business, stores and markets opened up throughout Hunza.

There were no accommodations such as hotels and lodges in Hunza for tourists so local and foreign visitors to the region stayed in the court of the Mir, who provided them with food and hospitality. The first hotel was built in the 1960s and by 1974 the number of hotels and lodges had increased significantly throughout Hunza. At present modern hotels in central Hunza include the Hunza Baltit Inn (the Aga Khan Tourism Promotion Services purchased the property from the son of the deposed Mir and refurbished it), the Darbar Inn built by the Mir's son and the Eagle's Nest Hotel built on a 2,850 meters high ridge overlooks the Altit village. Modern hotels facilitate tourism in the region (the tourism industry is a major source of revenue for Hunza as 70% of its income derives from tourism). Today Hunza is the only place in Pakistan where tourists are welcomed and walk freely around without fear of being harassed or kidnapped. However, the tourism industry suffered some setbacks after the 11 September incident in 2001 in the United States. Periodic armed confrontations in the tribal areas of Khaybar Pakhtunkhwa and the *Lal Masjid*, Red Mosque incident in Islamabad in 2007 also discouraged tourists from visiting Pakistan, although tourism agencies continued to facilitate visits to Hunza.

The public transportation system was almost non-existent a few decades ago and at present buses and mini buses commute between Hunza and Gilgit. Hunza is a place where past and present fuse peacefully, evidenced in the co-existence of old and modern housing systems. Old houses are made of stones and mud with pueblo-style steps leading to upper floors. These houses are mostly abandoned but not completely demolished as families built modern houses and some families maintain the exterior structure of house as a historical facade while building modern rooms inside.

Access to education transformed peoples' way of thinking with regard to supporting women's education and their involvement in the public sector of the economy and has indeed enhanced the status and position of women. Initially women were employed as teachers and after completing their higher studies they worked for AKDN, a successful endeavor that emboldened the government to recruit women in the local state bureaucracy. By paying higher salaries to its employees AKDN intended to eliminate opportunities for corruption; such as situations where underpaid government officers were compelled to take bribe just to make ends meet. Women are involved in greater numbers in outdoor activities and hold prominent positions in the private and public sectors of the economy. Women are more visible everywhere and walk freely without covering their faces or shying from strangers as women still do in Nagar. Although arranged marriage continues to be practiced as part of their tradition, women are not coerced into marriage against their will. In rural areas people marry at younger age while in the urban areas they prefer to marry late, after completing their education. Love marriages are on the rise as men and women can now meet easily at schools and their places of work. People used to prefer more children and mostly sons but today their perception of gender and having more children has changed. Families want few children so that they could provide them with access to quality education and ensure a good future for them. The rate of domestic violence is low compared to those in other communities in Pakistan where men murder women on mere suspicion of extra marital affairs and other acts of traditional improprieties.

### **Socio-economic and Educational Development**

The Ismaili spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, is viewed as a pioneer of development and modernization. Impressed by the natural beauty of the region and dismayed by abject poverty of its people during his first visit to Gilgit and Hunza on 20-26 October 1960, the Aga Khan was determined to end Hunza's geographical isolation and eliminate its rampant poverty. Prior to his visit to Hunza volunteers labored to build a road from Gilgit to Hunza and in a short time they built a makeshift road referred to as "jeepable road" because only lightweight vehicle could traverse it.<sup>52</sup> Since then the Aga Khan visited the Northern Areas on several occasions and was welcomed

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<sup>51</sup>. For details see John Clark. *Hunza: Lost Kingdom of the Himalayan* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1956).

<sup>52</sup>. Discussions with Nazir A. Sabir, Islamabad, 18 September 2007.



by the people and the leadership of Pakistan and the sign “welcome our Hazar Imam” written in stones is visible on the side of mountains from the Gilgit Airport to Upper Hunza.

The Aga Khan sees economic development as key to prosperity and he paid great attention to ensuring that people improve their living conditions. He instructed the AKRSP to initiate development projects for the region. AKRSP identified individuals to work as social organizers and dispatched them to villages to identify social activists who would mobilize public support for community projects and offered cash incentive for people to form a village organization. The objective was to determine the priority needs of a community; AKRSP then provided technical guidance and some financial assistance to cover the cost of the project and paid for community labors. When a project was completed successfully to the satisfaction of village members then AKRSP activists would encourage people to undertake other projects themselves without any assistance from AKRSP but by borrowing against the security of the village organization’s saving accounts. Helping communities to open their own saving accounts and use their saving for other projects AKRSP was intended to teach village organizations to sustain themselves as village banks and become self-reliant. Since 1982 AKRSP sponsored community development projects, build roads connecting villages to the main road and the Karakoram Highway and planted trees on mountain slopes to prevent soil erosion and contribute toward building a green environment. By 1990 AKRSP helped build and repair the irrigation systems of about 55,000 new agricultural farms while an estimated 70,000 fields had received supplemental water supplies. Most of the works are done in partnership with the community that contributed labor and materials.

Development of modern education in Hunza began in the late 1940s and it constituted one of the priority policies of development by the Aga Khan III as he was determined that modern education should be accessible to all Ismaili-settled regions. He used private and public funds to establish modern educational institutions. Although he did not visit Hunza, he had direct contacts with Mir Mohammad Jamal and persuaded him to encourage modern education there. The Aga Khan sent a message to him through his envoy Qudratullah Beg on 26 January 1946 who visited him in Bombay. The message reads:

I have had a long discussion with your representative Qudratullah Beg in the presence of your other subjects who are in Bombay about the facilities or rather lack of them for education in your kingdom. From what they say it appears to me that some serious measures should be taken to improve educational facilities in your kingdom. I am sure you as a good ruler and good Ismaili will take to heart the matter of vital interest to your subjects and see that educational facilities are available to all your Ismaili subjects and also to Ismailis in and near Gilgit. I am sure that you will heed this advice of mine and immediately start at least two schools in such areas in your state as may be intimated to you by Qudratullah Beg with whom I have had long and earnest discussions on the matter. In these schools education should be imparted in English, Persian and Urdu. Religious education should also accompany secular education.<sup>53</sup>

During this period there was just one primary school in Hunza and the number of schools increased in subsequent years as the Aga Khan Educational Service, AKES expanded the program covering all regions of the Northern Areas. At present there are many elementary schools, high schools and colleges as well as hostels for students who come from distant villages and cannot find accommodation with immediate family members.

English is the medium of instruction in private schools that charge tuition and fees while Urdu is medium of instruction in government schools where education is free of charge.<sup>54</sup> The literacy rate at 79% for male and 61% for female is the highest in Hunza comparing to other cities and towns in Pakistan, and “even a backward and isolated area like the Northern Areas of Pakistan, with less than 20 percent literacy, was able to provide 95 percent of the staff from within the region, who spoke at least one of the five local languages besides Urdu and English.”<sup>55</sup> The main reason for such high literacy is attributed to the Aga Khan III who is reported to have told his followers that “if a father has two children, one a son and the other a daughter and if he can educate only one of them, such parents, if they were to consult me, I would advise them to educate the daughter first.”<sup>56</sup> The Aga Khan believed that by educating a man one educates one person but by educating a woman one educates a family.

Since assuming leadership of the Ismaili community in 1957 the Aga Khan IV continued the tradition of his grandfather supporting modern education and establishing modern schools and colleges throughout the region. One such example is the establishment of a Professional Development Center for Northern Areas,

<sup>53</sup>. Cited in Sabine Felmy. op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>54</sup>. Discussions with Barkat Ali, AKES Education Officer for North, Hunza, 16 September 2007.

<sup>55</sup>. Shoaib Sultan Khan. “Rural Development.” In *Old Roads New Highways: Fifty Years of Pakistan*.

Edited by Victoria Schofield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 294.

<sup>56</sup>. Sherali Alidina and Kassim Ali (compiled and trans.) *Precious Pearls: Collected Speeches (Farmans) of Sultan Mohammad Shah, Aga Khan III* (Karachi: Ismaili Association, 1961), p. 54.

PDCN. The Center was established as a joint venture between the AKES and the Aga Khan University-Institute of Educational Development, IED. The campus is located in Konodass, Gilgit and officially was inaugurated in October 2000. Campus facilities include classrooms, hostel for faculty and students, a day care center, education and Children's library. PDCN works in partnership with the government and local organizations working to build the local capacity, conducting research on topical issues related to education and training of the trainers and offering short term courses for local NGOs. Women's Support Group, WSG of the PDCN was established in 2001 with the objective to enhance and promote an enabling environment for social, and political and economic empowerment of women in the Northern Areas.

Education was free of charge until 1992 and since then private educational institutions require students to pay monthly tuition and fees to cover the cost. Tuition and fees increase incrementally per month and the amount varies from one grade to the next. For example, students of third grade pay Rs 333, grade six pay Rs 444 and upper grades pay Rs. 4,000 (US \$ 1 = Rs. 60). People who cannot afford increasing tuition and fees for their children send their children to government schools.<sup>57</sup> However families prefer their children receive quality education and when they could afford it they send them to private schools and colleges. Educational development since 1946 has transformed Hunza to a community exporting surplus educated individuals such as engineers, medical doctors, and teachers throughout Pakistan and the neighboring countries of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Parallel to the modernization of Hunza's infrastructure the Aga Khan also worked toward preservation of the community's ancient cultural heritage. One such a project involves the restoration of the historical Baltit Fort in 1991 when Ghazanfar Ali donated the fort to the Baltit Heritage Trust in 1989. The restoration work began by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, AKTC and was completed in six years and was officially inaugurated by the Aga Khan and Pakistan President Farooq Laghari on 29 September 1996.

Ismailis have achieved a comparatively higher level of prosperity due to several factors: Guidance by the Aga Khan on religious, social, cultural issues, establishment of modern institutions by the Aga Khan aimed at improving the local economy, health and education, the willingness on the part of Ismailis to integrate themselves to the modern world and adopt its way of life while at the same time preserving their own cultural identity. The opening of the Karakoram Highway is most significant that increased trade, business and communications in the region.

Development projects sponsored by the AKDN have also benefited the Shia enclave in Hunza and helped them to improve their standards of living. However residents of Nagar remain behind their fellows in Hunza as their religious leaders did not support secular education. Initially the Shias were reluctant to allow AKDN to initiate programs in their communities, suspecting that it may use such programs as a means to convert the Shias to the Ismaili faith but over time their views changed as they did not perceive any hidden religious agenda and gradually they welcomed the assistance by the Ismailis. The Ismaili leadership believes that the wellbeing of its people depends on the security, welfare and prosperity of their neighbors as well. Based on this premise they provided material and human resources to help Nagar develop its own social and cultural institutions by sending midwives and teachers to help community members learn from their experiences. The AKDN projects in Nagar include building schools, medical centers and sending teachers to teach at schools and colleges.

## Conclusion

Modernization have reduced geographical isolation of many communities and people that had been disconnected from each other for centuries, and had little knowledge of what was happening beyond their own boundaries. Today people have access to the wider means of communications such as satellite dishes, internet facilities and such facilities are increasingly available even in the remotest regions of the world. This development has created a liberating information environment in places where almost no communication channels existed. Modernization also led to transformation of the centuries-old system of socio-political governance as disenchanting people learned from the experiences of their fellows in other parts of the world and campaigned for socio-political reforms. Their efforts paved the road for transformation of the political system and replacement of autocratic leaders with leaders who are supportive of modernity and globalization.

The rulers of Hunza limited and in some case actively prohibited peoples' contact with their neighboring communities and the outside world. Modernization transformed peoples' perspective with regard to the status quo and they began aspiring for leadership change. Abolishment of the princely state paved the way for greater integration of Hunza with communities around it. Modernization not only transformed Hunza's primitive infrastructures but also enhanced people's standards of living.

As a protagonist of development and modernization the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, the Aga Khan emphasized partnership of private, public, and civil society institutions – a strategy of development

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<sup>57</sup>. Discussions with Ghulam Mohammad, Pasu, Hunza, 13 September 2007.

that provides opportunities for all to work together in a common endeavor to help societies integrate themselves into a new era. During a speech at the United Nations Foundation Award in New York in October 2017 when the Aga Khan received the “Champion of Change Award” he stated that:

The concept of public-private partnerships has been one of the keys to the best work of our agencies, in many fields and many countries around the world in the last sixty years since I became the Imam of the Ismaili Muslim community. The public-private partnership formula alone, however, is incomplete - unless we also insert the words “Civil Society.” The partnerships that will most dramatically change the world are those in which all three components - private, public and civil society institutions can connect - one with the other - in all-embracing common effort.<sup>58</sup>

The Aga Khan continually stressed the need to create an enabling environment, providing people with opportunities to use their creativity, talents, skills and knowledge for the advancement of their lives and those of

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<sup>58</sup>. His Highness the Aga Khan Speech at the 2017 United Nations Global Leadership Dinner, United Nations Foundation Award, New York, 18 October 2017. <http://www.akdn.org/speech/his-highness-aga-khan/united-nations-foundation-award>. Site visited on 26 October 2017.

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their neighbors. He emphasized a harmonious development between the material and spiritual life of the community and to this end *Jamatkhanahs* and other institutional structures were established and individuals were identified and were given the responsibility to serve as religious leaders, teachers, administrators and managers. These individuals serve the institutions for a limited period of time as opposed to hereditary system of lifetime rule embodied in the person of the Mir and his descendants, who ruled Hunza over hundreds of years without allowing people to decide their own future. Religious institutional leaders are volunteers who serve for a three-year term and the term of their services can only be extended for one additional term. This initiative provides opportunities for people of different social status and backgrounds to become leaders of their respective communities and use their skills and profession to help the community overcome difficulties in the transition to the post-modern era.

The struggle for change by the people and strategies of development pursued by the Ismaili institutions has yielded great rewards for all parties. Hunza which was a poor and underdeveloped region a few decades ago became an active participant in the global community and the Ismailis adopted a modern lifestyle while still managing to preserve their cultural heritage and identity. The strategy of development - creating an enabling environment and empowering citizens pursued and implemented by the leadership, not doubt, provided Ismailis with the opportunity to enter history with no nostalgia for the past.